

DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEK LITERATURE.

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Annotation: This article discusses the development of Uzbek literature created on the territory of modern-day Uzbekistan.

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Uzbek literature comprises works created in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan from the 15th to the 20th centuries—beginning with the migration of Uzbek tribes from southern Kazakhstan.

The earliest Uzbek literary works include over 200 epic poems, numerous legends, and epic songs performed by folk poets known as bakhshis. The heroes of folklore battled hostile forces—evil spirits, dragons. The oldest epic cycles include Ker-Ogly and Alpamysh, composed around the 10th century. Alpamysh, a tale of heroic courage, bravery, and hatred of the enemy, became part of the folklore of all Central Asian peoples and contains witty aphorisms, vivid metaphors, and colorful descriptions. Another work from the Ker-Ogly cycle is the poem Ravshan-Khon, which tells of the transformative power of love and was repeatedly reinterpreted by folk poets.

Satirical tales of Nasreddin Afandi, which ridicule feudal lords and officials, remain popular. Folk oral literature includes characters of various nationalities—Chinese, Persian, Turkmen, African, etc. Female figures lack sentimentality (Farhad and Shirin, Kunduz-Yulduz). After the 13th-century Mongol conquest of Central Asia, many Persian writers and scholars migrated to Egypt, Asia Minor, and beyond. The region of Maverannahr, with Samarkand as its capital, became a domain of Chagatai, son of Genghis Khan. The literary language of the Turkic population became known as Chagatai. Based on Turkic-Uyghur roots, it included many Arabic and Persian elements and was not tied to any single ethnic group.

In Samarkand—formerly a center of Persian culture—literary works continued to be produced, such as Qissai Yusuf (1233) by Ali, influenced by Uyghur literature, Qissas al-Anbiya (1310) by Nasreddin Rabghuzi, and Muftakhul Adl by an unknown author. Literary traditions evolved by integrating new cultural currents, styles, and linguistic features.

The conquests of Timur and the arrival of Uzbek tribes in the 15th century facilitated intense cultural exchange, supported by the linguistic closeness of Chagatai and Uzbek. Major languages in use included Persian (Farsi), its Tajik variant, Chagatai (also called Old Uzbek or Turkī), and Uzbek (from the Kipchak branch of Turkic languages). This era coincided with a religious division—Shiite south (Iran) and Sunni north.

Uzbek culture formed through the preservation and development of its Turkic Uzbek language and the rich Persian cultural heritage. Uzbek literature developed through polemics and adaptation of classical Persian genres and plots. Poetry was the dominant form, with ghazals and rhymed couplets (masnavi) being most common. Not only lyrical works but also moral-religious teachings and chronicles were written in verse. Only scholarly, religious, historical works and memoirs were in prose.

Under Timur, Uzbek literature flourished. Samarkand and Herat became major cultural centers. Writers using Uzbek resisted replacing it with Persian, then considered the main bearer of cultural tradition. Contemporary poet Durbek offered a secular love version of Yusuf and Zulaikha (1409), stripping religious overtones. Said Ahmad's Taashuq-nama (1437) followed the model of Persian works like Lataif al-Nama and Muhabbat-nama.

The court of Shah Rukh was home to lyricist Lutfi, whose masterful ghazals are still sung today. The 15th century was a golden age for Uzbek literature, as it shed religious motifs and became truly artistic—best exemplified by the works of Alisher Navoi.

In 1469, Navoi became seal keeper to Sultan Husayn Bayqara of Khorasan, his former madrasa classmate. In 1472, he was appointed vizier and granted the title of emir. He supported scholars, artists, musicians, poets, and calligraphers, and oversaw construction of madrasas, hospitals, and bridges. His literary legacy includes around 30 poetry collections, major epics, prose, and scientific treatises. While he wrote in Farsi (Diwan-i Fani), his main body of work was in Turkī (medieval Uzbek), then deemed unfit for refined literature.

Navoi's magnum opus is Khamsa (Quintet)—five poems in response (nazira) to the Khamsas of Nizami Ganjavi and Amir Khusrow Dehlavi:

Confusion of the Righteous (1483) – a philosophical-publicistic poem condemning feudal strife, cruelty, hypocrisy, and corruption. Layli and Majnun (1484) – poetic retelling of the Arab legend about tragic love. Farhad and Shirin (1484) – a heroic-romantic love story opposing the just Farhad to the cowardly Shah Khusrow. Seven Planets (1484) – seven allegorical novellas criticizing Timurid rulers. The Wall of Iskandar (1485) – the ideal just ruler and sage Iskandar.

His Treasure of Thoughts (1498–1499) consists of four poetic divans: Wonders of Childhood, Rarities of Youth, Wonders of Maturity, Admonitions of Old Age—over 2600 ghazals in various lyrical genres. Other works include Five Sacred Ones (1492), dedicated to Jami, and Gathering of the Refined (1491–1492), short biographies of contemporary writers. In The Scale of Meters, he discusses versification and literary theory. The treatise Debate of Two Languages (1499) defends the cultural and literary value of Turkī.

Navoi's contributions supported the growth of Turkic literature not only in Uzbekistan but also among Uighurs, Turkmens, Azerbaijanis, and Turks. His historical works—History of Iranian Kings and History of Prophets and Sages—document legendary and historical figures of Central Asia and Iran, Zoroastrian and Quranic mythology. In his final years, he wrote Language of the Birds (1499) and Beloved of Hearts (1500)—a reflection on ideal social order. His worldview was optimistic and life-affirming, helping define the romantic tradition in Eastern literature.

Another major figure in Uzbek literary history was Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), founder of the Mughal Empire in India and last of the Timurids. His lyrical poetry represents the finest Uzbek verse of the time. His memoirs, Babur-nama, are a clear, simple prose account of his life, campaigns in Afghanistan and India, and political strife.

With the 16th-century transition from Timurid to Shaybanid rule, cultural and trade ties weakened. The most notable literary work of this period was the satirical Sheybani-nama by Muhammad Salih, denouncing Timurid excess and praising the new ruler Sheybani.

Under the Shaybanids, rulers like Ubaydulla Khan and Abdullah Khan practiced literature, considered a prestigious pursuit. However, their poetry imitated courtly traditions. In prose, the most recognized name of the 16th century was Majlisi, and the finest literary prose was Gulzar by Pasha Khoja ibn Abdullah, modeled after Saadi's Gulistan.

As the Shaybanid period progressed, Central Asia fragmented into small feudal states. Samarkand lost cultural status to Bukhara, where Tajiks predominated, and literature developed in the Tajik language. Brutal feudal conflicts—looting, violence, duplicity—were portrayed in the satirical works of poet Turdi.

In the 17th century, the Khiva Khanate emerged. Historical writing began with *The Genealogical Tree of the Turks* by Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur Khan (1603–1663). Courtly poetry—odes and ghazals praising khans—thrived. Leading poets appeared in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Among them was Shermuhammad Munis, a forward-thinking court poet who also authored historical works. At the order of Muhammad Rahim Khan II, a patron of the arts, the 19th-century anthology *Majmuat ush-Shuara* was compiled, collecting works of leading Khorezm poets: Kamal, Tabibi, Mirza, Raji, and others.

In general, the literary process in Uzbekistan was one of assimilating and adapting cultural models—Persian and Arabic classics in early periods, then Pan-Turkist, Russian, and Western influences. Uzbek literature’s characteristics were shaped by geography—distance from European centers, proximity to Eurasian Russia, and ties to the Muslim East.

The legacy of Bukhara and Samarkand, once great centers of Persian culture, endows modern Uzbekistan with a sense of literary inheritance. Its cultural potential, deep traditions, and position at a cultural crossroads suggest promising future developments of synthetic and original works in Uzbek literature.

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